

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

August 3, 2006

The Honorable Alberto Gonzales
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Gonzales:

I am writing to seek your immediate assistance for the people of New Orleans and Louisiana. As you are aware, the city has recently experienced the worst spate of criminal violence since the hurricane devastation of last year.

The criminal justice infrastructure in Orleans Parish is broken. It needs to be immediately fixed. Federal assistance is needed to assist local and state law enforcement and judicial agencies in their effort to rebuild this vital infrastructure in the affected areas.

To date, the full set of operations and facilities necessary to the functioning of a strong and effective criminal justice system in a major metropolitan area has not been restored. The Orleans Parish district attorney's office has thousands of pending cases; despite impressive efforts, the U.S. Attorney's office is chronically understaffed; detention facilities are extremely inadequate; and there is no operating training academy for the New Orleans Police Department to bring on additional recruits.

A month ago, the Governor of Louisiana was compelled to take the costly step of deploying National Guard troops to the city. While this step has undoubtedly improved public safety in some areas, the fact remains that violent crime is on a dangerous rise.

A major difficulty, of course, is that vast areas of hurricane-ravaged areas contain abandoned buildings and houses. By abandoned, I do not always mean uninhabited. These derelict structures and destroyed homes are the perfect breeding ground for gang-based drug distribution and manufacturing. Much of the recent violence in the city has been linked to drugs and gangs. However, there is also emerging evidence that gangs are aware of the criminal justice system's difficulties, and they intend to maximize their window of opportunity.

What is called for is a sustained and unprecedented effort to destroy this violent criminal element before it takes root and spreads. This rising violence threatens the very foundation of our rebuilding efforts. Leading the nation in murders is not something that can be allowed to be part of New Orleans' future.

I respectfully request that you take immediate steps to deploy additional federal law enforcement resources to New Orleans and the metropolitan region and to work with state and local officials in this effort. In addition to more FBI and DEA agents, additional staff for the U.S. Attorney's office is critically needed, as are additional detention facilities, probation and parole officers, and juvenile crime specialists.

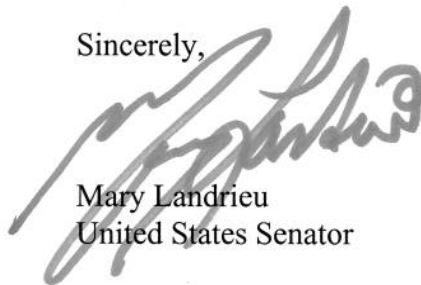
Further, I ask you to join me and other members of our congressional delegation in traveling to New Orleans as soon as your schedule would allow. The object of this trip would be to hold a coordinating meeting with federal, state, regional and local officials, law enforcement agencies, corrections officers and court administrators who are working to address this crisis, including members and section chairs of the Southeast Louisiana Criminal Justice Recovery Task Force, to ensure full cooperation and rapid deployment of maximum resources.

Through these coordinated efforts, it is my intention to guarantee that the full power and authority of the American justice system is applied to eliminate this threat to the future of New Orleans and the affected region. In particular, I believe that we must focus on the use of a variety of flexible legal tools, such as Federal RICO statutes, and the reestablishment of the components of a fully functioning infrastructure to rebuild a swift and certain justice system that has the resources to break the drug rings and criminal gangs that are now reemerging.

Mr. Attorney General, I deeply appreciate your attention to this mounting crisis. I will be contacting your office directly to discuss scheduling options and ways the federal government can provide assistance where it would be most useful and helpful.

With warmest regards, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mary Landrieu", is written over the typed name and title.

Mary Landrieu
United States Senator

MLL/jdm